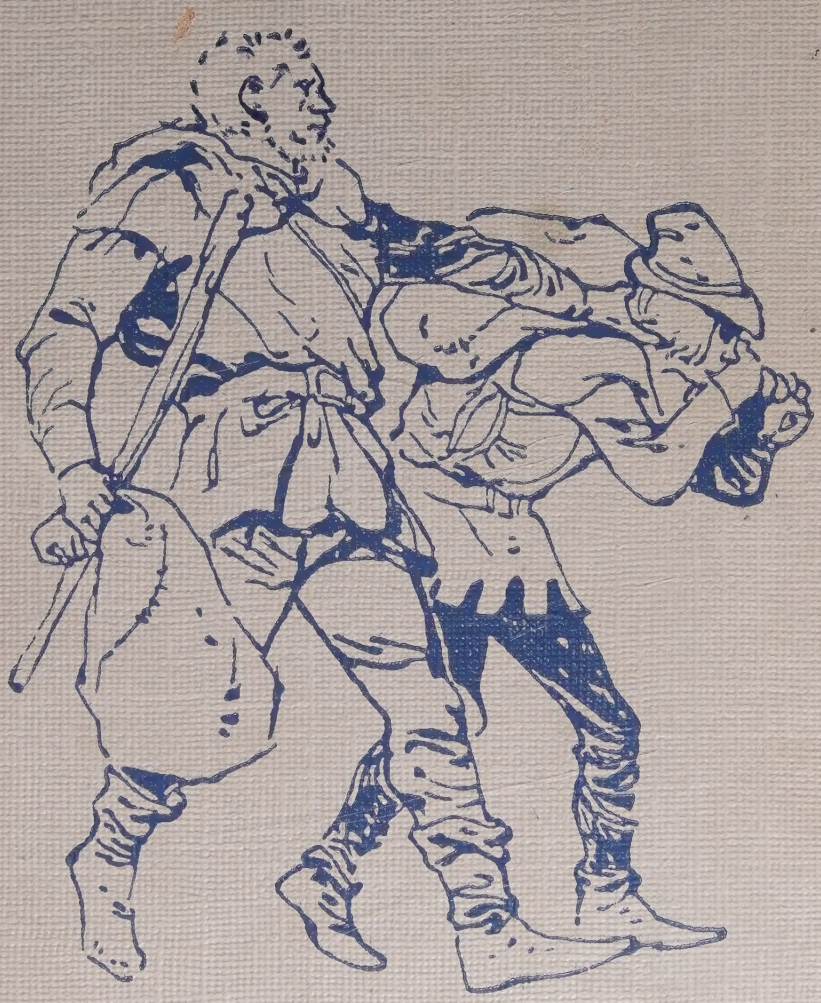

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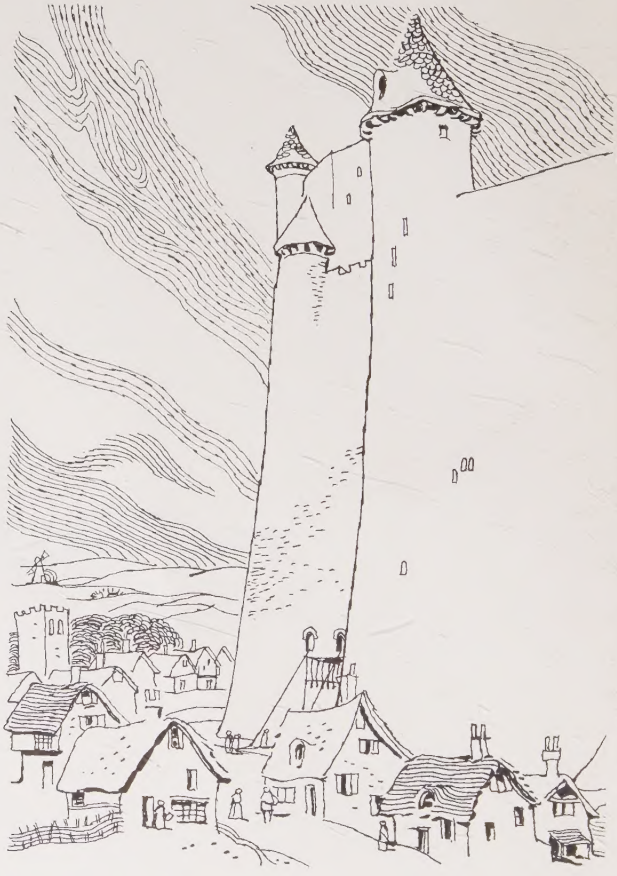

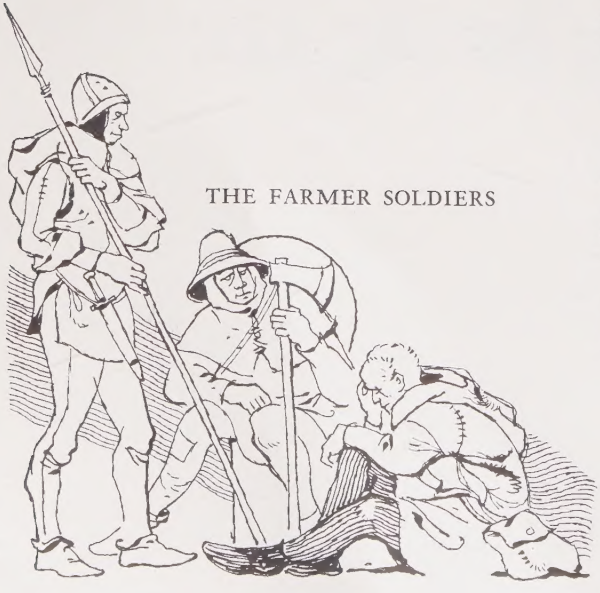

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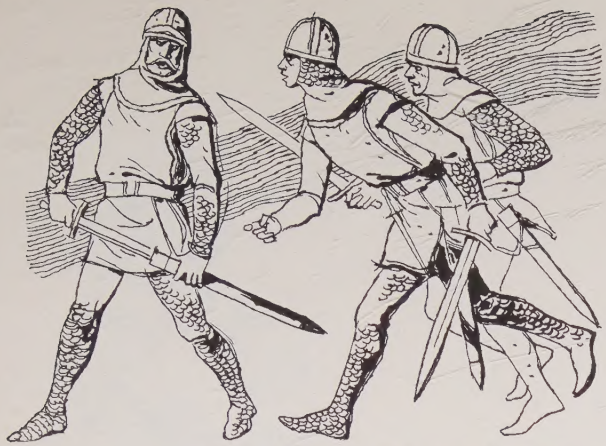

SOLDIERS OF THE CASTLE GUARD

THE GYPSY LAD

THE CASTLE

THE KING

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THE TALE OF ALAIN

EDWARD ORMONDROYD

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For Ruth and Evan

THE TALE OF ALAIN

I

Fenn's Merry Tunes

Several times a week Prince Fenn said to his younger brother, Alain, "Come along, Stupid, let's look at the vermin." And off he would stride, with never a backward glance, knowing that Alain would follow humbly and fearfully behind him. Up and up they would go, up broad stairs, then middling stairs, and finally narrow winding stairs, until they were at the top of the highest tower in the castle. It was here that Alain would start to drag his feet and fall behind his brother. But Fenn would go straight to the parapet, and lean his elbows on it and look over.

"Look at them," he would say, turning to the empty space where Alain should have been. Not finding him there, he would whirl around with a scowl and shout, "What are you hanging back for, you sniveler?"

Alain, who was terrified of heights, would mumble some excuse and begin to creep forward on trembling legs. And when he wasn't fast enough (which was most of the time) Fenn would reach out with a snarl, seize him by the hair, and jerk him over the parapet until he was perilously balanced there on his stomach, with his whole upper body swaying out over the edge.

"Now open your eyes!" Fenn commanded. "*Open* them! *Open* them! *Open* them!" — shaking his brother each time he said it.

Then for an instant Alain would open his eyes and see through his tears an immense aching distance and, down, down, down, at the giddy bottom of it, the tiny streets of the town and the tiny people crawling through them. The sight always made Alain weak and dizzy almost to the point of fainting.

"All right," he would choke, "I've looked at them. Now let me back."

"A pretty sight, isn't it, Stupid? Say it!"

"A pretty sight," Alain would whisper, with his eyes tight shut again. "Let me back, please!"

Then Fenn would haul him back, throw him down on

the floor, and resume his own gazing down into the streets. His nose had been twisted at birth: one nostril flared out, one side of his upper lip was pulled up, so that he had a permanent sneer on his face. But he never seemed to sneer so much as when he was looking over the town. "Yes, a pretty sight," he would murmur, "a juicy sight. Look at them! Did you get a good look at them, Sniveler? Ah, look at them, the vermin! The creeping, crawling insects! How I'll make them hop when I am king! I'll make you hop, too, Stupid, wait and see. Oh, I've got plans for all of you, you and those animals down there! Just wait and see. You'll all dance to some merry tunes when I am king!"

So he would go on and on, half to himself, half to Alain. And Alain, lying wretchedly on the floor, knew that Fenn's were no idle boasts, for he had danced to his brother's merry tunes all his life.

Indeed, Fenn had merry tunes for all occasions. He played such merry tunes on his bow that the swallows and pigeons around the castle all died from the arrows. His merry tunes were painfully known to all the cats in the castle, and, except for the king's own hunting hounds, to all the dogs; and these creatures crept into hiding whenever they heard him coming to avoid hearing any more. If a rat or mouse fell into his traps he would teach it merry tunes until it was dead. When rats and mice were not available, he caught flies or beetles, and made them dance with their wings and most of their legs torn off.

He always had time to teach Alain a new tune or practice an old one on him. He knew some forty different ways of hurting Alain so that it wouldn't show afterwards; and he was several years older and such a wickedly strong boy that his brother had long since given up the idea of fighting him back. All the servants in the castle went in dread of Fenn, but they pretended that the torments he put upon them were good jokes, from fear of provoking worse. The princes' tutor was in daily terror also. If he reproached Fenn for not learning his lessons, Fenn would say quietly, "I shall remember you when I am king;" whereupon the white-faced tutor could do nothing but turn on Alain and scold *him* for stupidity.

But for the soldiers of the castle guard he played merry tunes of quite a different sort. It was his intention to start many glorious wars when he was king; so he thought it wise to be respectful toward even the lowest of foot soldiers, and to flatter all of them without stint. He hung about them whenever he could spare time from his music making, and praised their weapons and armor, and asked hundreds of questions, and fought mock duels with them, and feasted them in their quarters with pastries that he stole from the kitchens and wines that he smuggled out of the cellars. And when he had learned from them a new trick with the sword or quarterstaff, he would practice it on Alain — always taking care, of course, with his usual skill, that the resulting cuts and bruises on his brother's body would not show.

Their father, the king, knew nothing of all this. It was his habit to speak to them every night, alone, in his private apartments. For these occasions Fenn would screw the twisted side of his face down, and the other side of his face up, and manage to assume a very passable expression of reverence and love.

"And how have you passed this day, my sons?" the king would fondly ask.

"Most instructively and industriously, Father," Fenn would answer. "Have we not, dear brother?"

Alain, still smarting from the vicious pinch that Fenn always gave him just before they entered the apartment, would nod silently.

"Excellent, excellent," the king would say, beaming. "Tell me about it, then."

If Fenn had been carousing with the soldiers he would say, "I have been studying the military arts, Father, for I wish to be a good soldier and defend my country well." And if he had been torturing some mouse or fly he would say, "I have spent this day meditating upon the lives of insects and rodents. Don't you think, Father, that even the greatest of us may have much to learn from the humblest of creatures? Why else should they have been put on the earth but for our instruction? I hope that I am never so proud that I cannot look to the meanest fly and learn something from it."

The king would shake his head in wonder at such wisdom,

and say, "Yes, you are a good boy, my son, and will make a great and good king. But come, my Alain, have you nothing to say for yourself?"

But what could Alain say — that the tutor had scolded him all morning for Fenn's mistakes, or that Fenn had been beating him all afternoon? So he would only flush and shake his head; and sometimes, to his great shame, tears would squeeze out of his eyes.

"Alas!" Fenn would say in the most piteous tones, "don't be angry with him, Father. It is true that he is very slow to learn, and sullen most of the time, and shows little interest in anything. But don't be angry with him, Father — who knows how much he may improve when he decides to put his mind to it? I try to help him every day. And even if our tutor loses patience with him, I am certain that in time he will improve if he will only try."

"Yes, yes, my son," the king would say to Alain, "you must try a little harder. I know you mean well, but you must exert yourself more." And he would pat Alain lovingly on the shoulder, but the expression on his face would be sad and disappointed.

So it was only natural that Alain should come to have a very poor opinion of himself. Sometimes he would look into a mirror at his pale, unattractive weak face, and think, "What a useless creature I am!" And he would go off sniffling, rubbing his eyes on his sleeve, hating life in general and himself in

particular. "Some day," he thought feebly, "I will become very big and strong, and then I'll take Fenn by the throat and end these merry tunes forever." He did not know how this could possibly happen, but dreaming of it was the only consolation he had.

II

Fenn Becomes King

Then one day, when the two brothers were at their lessons, and the tutor had just finished scolding Alain because Fenn could not answer the questions, a messenger burst into the schoolroom, fell on his knee before Fenn, and cried out, "The king is dead. Long live the king!"

Alain was so stunned by the news that he could do nothing but sit in his seat as if frozen. The tutor's face went whiter than ever with fear of Fenn. And Fenn, the new king, dropped his head into his arms and burst into wild sobs.

"Go, go," he choked at last, with his head still buried in

his arms. "Leave us alone with our grief." When the tutor and the messenger had left the room, closing the door behind them, he raised his head. There were no tears on his face. The twisted side of his nose and mouth sneered in such dreadful triumph that Alain cowered back in terror. But Fenn paid no attention to him. In utter silence he danced about the room, and hugged himself, and waved his arm around as if cutting off heads, all the while sneering and grinning so horribly that his face was like a waxen mask that had melted out of shape on one side. At last he calmed down, and screwed his features into an expression of sorrow and fortitude. He even managed to force some false tears from his eyes as he walked forth into the castle with a sober, stately tread.

There followed the first weeks of peace that Alain had ever known, for Fenn was so busy with arrangements for their father's funeral and his own coronation that he had no time to play his usual merry tunes on his brother. But there was no happiness for Alain despite this stop to his torments. Day and night the great bells in the town tolled like bronze hearts breaking, and gave him no rest. Sometimes they mourned *"dead — dead — dead"* as if speaking of the old king. At other times, with a deeper perilous note, they seemed to say *"wait — wait — wait"* as if warning of things to come under the new king. So Alain wandered through the castle with the throb of bells pursuing him like hounds. He was numb with sorrow when they tolled *"dead,"* because his father was the only person

who had ever been in the least kind to him; and he was numb with fear when they warned *"wait,"* because he knew that Fenn's tunes would be merrier than ever now that there was no need to hide the results of them. Between the two sounds of the bells and the two feelings they made in him, he nearly went moping mad. He was supposed to take his part at the funeral and coronation, and ministers and chamberlains and the tutor came every day to teach him what to say, and when, and how to stand, and where. But he was in such a state that he could learn even less than before, and everything he did was absolutely wrong. But even then Fenn left him alone.

"An undutiful son and undutiful brother," Fenn said with his high sneer. "We had better leave him out altogether, or he will disgrace us in public."

So they left him to his own devices, and he wandered distracted through the castle, listening to the bells. The funeral came and went, and still they mourned and warned day and night. And then — he did not know how many days later — they stopped suddenly, and there was a dreadful silence for several hours, during which he stood frozen and listened to the thudding of his own heart. Now the bells burst out again, this time with a joyous peal and carol, a clangor of celebration, announcing that the new king was crowned. But one great iron tongue of a bell, ignoring the rapid ringing of the rest, said only *"now — now — now"* in a terrible fateful tone.

As Alain stood listening, he also heard the cheering of a

thousand throats and a rumble of carriages approaching the castle with the new king. *"Now — now — now"* said the one bell; and the thought flashed across his mind like a swallow darting away from a hawk, "Yes, now — Now the merry tunes begin again, only merrier than ever." He wanted to hide, but it was useless — Fenn knew of every hiding place in the castle. He was powerless to do anything but stand and wait, suffocating with terror.

Nor did he have to wait long. The clash of wine bottles, the tuning of viols and fiddles, and all the other noises of celebration had hardly begun in the great hall when Alain heard feet tramping toward him down the corridor, and in another moment Fenn appeared with a group of soldiers.

"There!" Fenn cried. "He would not attend his father's funeral or his brother's crowning, but remained here to plot against me. Seize him!"

A great weariness came over Alain as he thought, "Here it is at last." He even took a step toward them, as if glad that the waiting was over and that something definite, no matter how terrible for him, was about to take place. But then he glanced at his brother's face. Never before had he seen it twisted into such a mad state of hatred and triumph — the flaring nostril and crooked lip were twitching half way up the livid cheek. Something brushed Alain's weariness aside and touched his numb legs into life. As the foremost soldier reached out for him, he turned and bolted like a rabbit.

III

The Mysterious Stranger

Alain was not usually a good runner, being a weak boy and knowing from experience that Fenn always caught him anyway. But he ran now as if he had been in training for this dash all his life. He ran without hope and without plan; but he had no need of either with the remembrance of Fenn's face to goad him on. He darted up the corridor and dodged down stairs and twisted into side passages to such good effect that he soon found himself alone in an audience chamber, with the shouts of the pursuing soldiers faint in the distance.

The first dash had been guided by pure instinctive terror. Now Alain began to think. One thing was in his favor, anyway: now that Fenn was king he would not chase his brother himself, but would send soldiers to do it for him. But was that really a help? The soldiers would not know Alain's hiding places as Fenn did, but Fenn could call more and more of them in, a hundred, five hundred, until the castle was full of them, until Alain could not stir without being seen. Now that it was getting dark, he might evade them for a while, but how long could he keep it up? As long as he was in the castle he was in a trap, and his capture was only a matter of time. He must get out into the town and — and then think about what was to be done next.

But how to get out? Of course all the entrances and exits would be closely guarded. There were windows. . . . He went quickly to the nearest window and opened it. It was heavily barred outside the panes. He measured the distance between the bars with his hands, and looked down at his body. Yes, he might just squeeze through. For the first time in his life, he felt thankful for being so thin.

What a racket they were making out there on the other side of the outer wall! Apparently the townspeople did not know that their new king thought of them as vermin and that he intended to teach them his merry tunes. They were busy now with their own merry tunes, and playing them as loudly as they could on fifes, drums, fiddles, lutes, and shawms, sing-

ing and cheering and dancing the while. Over the top of the wall Alain could see torches being waved aloft, or homemade banners, or sometimes a cap hoisted on a stick. That was all to the good — such merrymaking and confusion would help him to slip through the streets unobserved.

But he had to get to the streets first — and unfortunately there was a moat beneath his window and the outer wall. He looked down at it now. Immediately the old sick dizzy fear of heights seized him. How terribly far below it was! He drew back with his eyes tightly shut. No. He would have to dodge the soldiers somehow and find a window lower down. And the sooner the better.

He turned, opening his eyes — and there was Fenn, leaning in the doorway and smiling his twisted triumphant smile.

"A long way down, isn't it?" he jeered. "And you'd be afraid of that height even if you had a ladder and two stout fellows to help you down it, wouldn't you, Sniveler? So just have the goodness to stand there, will you, while I call up a couple of soldiers to conduct you to the dungeon?"

Fenn put his head out the door to whistle up his soldiers. And in that instant Alain discovered that height was not such an important consideration after all. He squeezed through the bars like a ferret squeezing through a mouse hole, and fell sprawling and twisting into the moat.

He had never dreamed that water could be so hard. It was like falling on the ground to hit it: the jolt knocked most

of the wind out of him and made his whole back smart as if lashed with a whip. But it wasn't so hard that he couldn't swallow a good deal of it on his way to the bottom of the moat. He was busy down there for a lung-bursting while, kicking himself free of water weed and wriggling out of his cloak. But when he bobbed up to the surface again, choking and spitting out greasy water, aching all over from the impact and the near-drowning, his spirits suddenly soared, and he laughed outright for the first time he could ever remember. "Come," he thought, "this isn't so bad! Fenn has hurt me more than this many a time, and with only one blow at that. Afraid of that height even if I had a ladder, am I? Why, I'll never be afraid of heights again!"

However, there was no time to be lost in congratulating himself. The soldiers would not be long in swarming out and surrounding the wall. He would have to climb over it quickly and lose himself in the crowd. And to lose himself in the crowd meant that he would have to look as unprincely as possible. So he pulled the rings off his fingers and the silver chain from his neck and the ornamental jeweled dagger from his waist, and let them sink. Wherever the fabric was weak enough, he tore holes in his clothes; and to finish his disguise, he brought some mud up from the bottom and smeared himself with it. The soldiers couldn't recognize him now! And so for the wall.

But there his newborn spirits withered and died. The wall was as sheer as a sea cliff, and slimy from the water's edge

upward, and for all his groping and exploring in the dark, Alain could not find handhold or foothold sufficient even for a water rat. A wall of ice could not have been more effective as a trap.

"So now they have me," he thought in despair. A vision of Fenn's twisted smile floated before him in the dark, and he thought, "Oh no, oh no — I'll drown myself first!" And he splashed away from the wall and made ready to dive under.

But before he could do so, there was an outburst of noise on the other side of the wall, a prodigious cheering and shouting: *"Hurrah, hurrah, hurrah! Speech, Dick, speech! Give it to us strong, Dick! Speech! Hoist him up, hoist him up! Speech, Dick! Hurrah!"* Torches appeared over the top of the wall, waving and flaring violently, and handkerchiefs on poles, and caps flying thick through the air. And then Dick himself, a gaunt ragged man with golliwog hair and a nose as bright red as the torches, appeared as suddenly as if fired up by a cannon. He rolled along the top of the wall and then staggered to his feet, hiccupping loudly the while.

"Friends!" he bellowed. "Fellow townsmen!"

"Hurrah, hurrah! That's the stuff, Dick! Don't spare the words, Dick! Speech, speech! Sing away, Dick!"

"Friends! This glorious and noble occasion —"

"Now you're talking, Dick! Bring it out strong, Dick! Here, Dick, wet your whistle! Can't make a speech with a dry throat! Where's the whistle-wetter? Here he is, here he is!

Hoist him up there! Help's a-coming, Dick!" And now another man shot up into sight like a jack-in-the-box, grinning and waving a bottle. He was closely followed by a group of self-appointed assistants, ragamuffin boys who capered about on the wall, and hugged themselves with joy, and encouraged Dick by pointing at him and whooping.

"Friends!" Dick roared. "My emotions on this noble occasion are such as which no human tongue is capable of telling of!" Whatever his emotions, his legs suddenly tired of the whole business and buckled under him. He staggered back, seized the whistle-wetter with his right hand, the nearest ragamuffin with his left, and, with both of them in his clutch, went off the wall in a great tumbling arc. Alain had no time to get out of the way. There was a grunting smash and splash on top of him and all around him. They all went to the bottom like stones, and had a notable battle there to get clear of each other and the clinging weeds, during which Alain forgot his intention of drowning himself and kicked out with the best.

They emerged into a scene of glorious confusion. The ragamuffins who had not had the honor of going down with Dick were making up for it by pushing each other into the moat as fast as they could and whooping at the top of their lungs. Torches were springing up on the wall like the spread of wildfire, making the water sparkle and throwing grotesque shadows against the castle. A thousand voices seemed to be shouting at once: *"Ropes! Bring ropes! Dick's drowned! No,*

he hasn't! Confound those boys! Where's Dick? Ropes!" A ragamuffin suddenly bobbed up in front of Alain, grinned at him, and said, *"What* a lark, eh, mate?"

"FRIENDS!" Dick bellowed, so close behind Alain and the other boy that they nearly jumped clear of the water, like porpoises. "Fellow townsmen! My emotions are such as which blub blub no water can blub glub!" *"Hurrah, hurrah! There's old Dick! Is your whistle wet enough now, Dick? Ropes, ropes here! Mind your eye, Dick, here comes the ropes!"* A number of ropes were flying through the air all at once and tangling with each other. "Here you are, mate," said Alain's new friend, thrusting a frayed rope-end into his hand. "Both of us at the same time, eh? Let old Dick find his own rope, eh? Hold tight! Haul away!" he shouted. And the two of them, like sacks of grain being hoisted into a mill, went bumping and scraping up the wall at a great rate.

A dozen hands haled them roughly over the top and threw them down the other side, where their fall was broken by the thick press of bodies. "Here comes old Dick!" someone shouted from the top; and indeed, Dick's voice could be heard, as if from the inside of a vault, still descanting on the state of his emotions. "Hurrah, hurrah! On with the speech, Dick!" the crowd roared.

Alain found himself being tossed into the air along with the caps, empty bottles, and apple cores. "Let me down!" he cried. A pair of burly arms sent him soaring again. But now

the cries of "Speech!" were giving way to a cry of "Soldiers! Look out, soldiers! Make way for the soldiers!" Alain fell into the press with his arms and legs flailing. He must get away! The cobblestones were under his feet. He was running blindly through a vast hot welter of dancing bodies, bonfires, booths, musicians, piemen.

Suddenly a voice growled in his ear, "There you are! You just come along with me!" And he was brought up short in his flight by a hand that clamped on his collar.

It was as if he were a balloon that had been blown up to the fullest by the fear, hope, despair, and excitement of the last hour. When the hand seized his collar, the balloon burst. Everything went out of him with a rush. He was a limp fragment being hauled through the crowd at a tremendous pace. With his eyes shut he thought drearily, "Fenn wins, as usual. Back to the castle, on with the merry tunes."

Back to the castle, plowing through the crowd like a swift ship through masses of driftwood. Bursts of music came and went; shouts, cheers, snatches of song; heat and light as they hurried by the bonfires; darkness and cold beyond. What an extraordinary time it was taking them to reach the castle!

Ah, here was a step up — his shins scraped cruelly as he was pulled over it — the drawbridge at last. But no — it was not wood his feet were dragging over, but cobblestones still. . . .

"Walk, won't you?" the voice growled; "none of those drag-back tricks with me — you're no sack of pudding!"

Alain's legs mechanically began to move, at more of a trot than a walk. The noises of celebration were growing fainter behind them by the minute. Something was strange here — this man did not jingle and clank while he walked, as a soldier would. Alain opened one wary eye. Most unmilitary boots — a thick cudgel instead of a sword . . . He opened both eyes, took a quick look about him, and stared up at his captor.

The man was not a soldier. They were not returning to the castle, but hurrying away from it as fast as they could, through the darkness and most deserted streets of the town.

IV

On The Road

They had reached the end of a dark, closed alley before the stranger let go of Alain's collar. Alain was so dazed that he did not even think of fleeing, but stood there staring like a stupid sheep at this mysterious shadow beside him.

"Change your clothes," the shadow ordered.

Automatically Alain began to pull off his sopping tunic. Then he stopped and said, "But I haven't got any other clothes."

"Now don't try those tricks on me, Tom! Whose things

do you think these are, the Lord Mayor's?" And the shadow kicked at a large bundle and a smaller bundle on the ground, that Alain had not noticed before.

"Tom?" Alain thought to himself, "what does he mean, Tom?" And suddenly it came to him — the man had mistaken him for someone else in the darkness and confusion! A fortunate mistake, certainly, as far as Alain was concerned. The thing to do now was to set the fellow right, thank him for the happy rescue from the soldiers, and go on his way. So he said, "I think you have made a mistake."

"Mistake, nothing!" growled the shadow. "Change those clothes, won't you?"

"But I'm not Tom!"

"Really! And perhaps you'll favor me with your real name, then?"

It was on the tip of Alain's tongue to say who he really was, but at the last instant he thought better of it. He must hide his tracks, and one of the first things to do was to assume a different name. But not another name would come to him! He stammered.

"Your name's Tom, or *my* name isn't Hook — which it is," said the shadow impatiently. "Now change those clothes! We haven't got all night to argue about names. Here — you wear that, and that." And he rummaged through the smaller bundle, pulling out clothes and handing them to Alain.

"Ah, what's the use?" Alain thought. "At least I'll be

harder to recognize in different clothes. If he wants to trade what I have for what he has, why not?" So he struggled out of his clothes and put on the ones Hook gave him, which were very coarse and of a surprisingly good fit. But when Hook got his velvets and satins in return, he rolled them up into a ball and flung them without a word over the nearest wall.

"Now then, Tom," said Hook, "up with that bundle on your back, and best foot forward! There's a long journey ahead of us, and not much time to make it in."

So they shouldered their burdens and left the town.

Alain's thoughts were in such a whirl that he could not even see straight. But he did not puzzle long over the turn his affairs had taken. The bundle on his back was a heavy one, and Hook walked at such a tremendous pace that he was obliged to follow at a half-trot. Soon there was nothing in his mind but a kind of grim determination to keep up, and then a weary numbness, and at last a complete mental blank. When, many hours later, they stopped to take lodgings in a haystack, he did have a brief conscious thought: "He'll be angry — when it's light — and he sees I'm not Tom after all — but it can't be helped —" And he plunged into such a sleep that even Fenn, with all his merry tunes, could not have awakened him.

But he was wrong about Hook, for the first words that greeted him when he awoke next morning were, "Well, Tom, you sleep well enough!" It was full daylight, and the man's eyes were fixed intently on him. They were keen eyes, steel-

blue, and so sharp that it seemed they could have pierced a stone wall, or looked through falsehood as easily as through glass. And yet they showed no surprise at finding Alain instead of the mysterious Tom. "Here," Hook continued, "let's see if you can eat as well as you snore." He brought a piece of cheese and a piece of bread out of his bundle, broke each exactly in half, and gave Alain his share.

It was the best breakfast Alain had ever had in his life. As he devoured it he thought, "I must look more like Tom than his own twin brother! Well, then, Tom I'll remain, since he seems to insist on it." And he studied Hook secretly. The man was large and powerfully built, face as brown as a walnut, grey hair and beard — he seemed made all of gnarled oak and iron. "I'll stay with him," Alain thought; "at least until I learn how to make my own way about."

He soon regretted that decision. When they stood up to continue their journey, every bone in his body twinged with pain. He could scarcely lift his bundle to his galled and aching shoulder. It was a torture trying to keep up with Hook's giant stride. After a short time on the road, he collapsed.

"Come along, Tom," said Hook quietly.

"I can't," Alain gasped.

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"Come along, Tom."

"No," said Alain. He began to feel sorry for himself, and he groveled in the dust and whined, "I'm too weak, I'm tired, I can't do it."

"Get up, Tom," Hook said, still quietly. But there was a light in his eyes sharper than any whip; and when Alain saw that, he got sullenly to his feet.

"Best foot forward!" said Hook, and they went on as before.

Alain felt such a wave of self-pity welling up in him that tears started in his eyes. Nothing ever went well with him . . . everyone treated him like an animal . . . the whole world took advantage of his weakness and wretchedness. . . . Soon he was blubbering out loud, so tear-blinded that he stumbled over every obstacle in the way. Hook paid no attention, and showed him no mercy when he fell, but stood over him and said, "Get up!" in such a tone that Alain had to obey.

Apparently Hook's ears were as keen as his eyes. Three times that day he stopped short and lifted his head, and then said, "Off the road, Tom." They would lie low in a ditch, then, or crouch behind a hedge. And each time, after a long silence, there would be a clatter on the road, and a group of soldiers would ride by, jingle and clash. And only long after they had gone by would Hook and Alain resume their journey.

So they traveled for a week. Sometimes it rained. On other days the sun was so hot that the air around them seemed to bubble like boiling water. They slept in haycocks, or deserted cowsheds, or sometimes in the open fields. Morning and night Hook rummaged in his bundle and brought out some bread, or cheese, or an onion, or a turnip, and once even a piece of tough

meat; and whatever he found, he always cut exactly in half, to share it with Alain. The only rest they had during the daytime was when they hid in the hedges and ditches from the soldiers.

Alain was a lump of aching, self-pitying misery the whole time. When he could think at all, he thought that he was much worse off now than he possibly could have been dancing to Fenn's merry tunes. He groaned and moaned and complained and whined. When Hook refused to shorten his stride or say one word of comfort, he would begin to snivel, and then to weep outright. Blubbering along the road, he fell into his old habit of hating life in general and himself in particular.

But at the end of the week a voice inside himself finally said, "Come, this is shameful! Anyone who was afraid of heights, but jumped from a high window into a moat anyway, should have some pride!" He wiped his eyes on his sleeve, and thought angrily, "All right, I'll have done with it! I won't snivel any more." Suddenly his bundle seemed lighter, and he thought — although he was not quite sure — that he saw Hook smile briefly.

V

The Juggler

One very warm morning Hook led the way to one side of the road, into a thicket under a stand of beech trees. He threw his bundle to the ground and motioned to Alain to do the same.

"Now, Tom," he said, "there's a town a few miles up this road, and I've got some business there. You just lie low here, will you, and keep a watch over our gear, and don't talk to anyone if you can help it. I'll be back around sunset." And off he went, striding up the road without a backward glance.

Alain was glad enough to take a rest, and he could not have

found a pleasanter spot to rest in if he had gone looking for it. The shade of the beeches made it cool, there was a halfhearted breeze making a rustle in the branches, and a bird hidden in the thicket said "zzip — zzip — zzip" to itself endlessly. It wasn't long before Alain was full-length on the grass, fast asleep with his head pillowed on his bundle.

He was awakened by the sound of singing on the road. It was a young voice and a merry one, caroling fa la la as if the whole of life were one long May-festival. Now, Alain had heard no other voice but his own and Hook's for a week, and he had seen no one else but grim soldiers riding by. The sound of this gay singing acted upon him like a magnet. Completely forgetting Hook's command to lie low, he jumped to his feet and peered out over the thicket. In the same instant the singer caught sight of him, and stopped short.

He was a boy about Alain's age, dressed in a motley of red and yellow, and carrying a large pack on his back. He had a green cap with a long feather in it on his tumbled mop of hair, sharp black eyes, and a brown rogue's face with such a jolly smile that Alain could not help laughing just to look at him.

The other laughed too, and pushed the cap back on his head and said, "Hullo, youngster! That's a shady-looking spot you've found there. So by your leave I'll just step in a while and rest a bit. It's hot work walking this road, and I haven't had the pleasure of a word with someone now for — let me see,"

and here he cocked his eye thoughtfully at the sun, "why, smash my hat! for at least an hour! Well met!" He stepped jauntily over to Alain, threw his pack to the ground, whipped off his cap, and used it to wipe his forehead with such a comical gesture that Alain had to laugh again.

"Laugh away!" said the boy. "That's music to me, and I won't deny it. Make people laugh, and you'll always know where your supper's coming from. Laugh yourself, and the supper will taste better than a duke's banquet. Been on the road long?"

"Oh, a little while," Alain said, suddenly wary. He had just remembered Hook's warning not to speak to anyone, and he realized that this fellow could charm every secret he had out of him if he weren't careful.

"Dash me! — just a little while? *I've* been on the road all my life — born and bred on it — it's home and life to me, and I wouldn't have any other. I know the roads of three kingdoms as well as you know your own name. What *is* your name, youngster?"

"They call me Tom," said Alain.

"A good name, too, by my hat! — short and sweet. They call *me* Guy, and sometimes Guy the Juggler when they're feeling respectful. Didn't know I had a title, did you? Oh, burnish my buckles, yes! I'm a member of the nobility of the road, I am, with a title and all." He pushed his cap forward, raised his nose in the air, and lowered his eyelids, producing such

a marvelous imitation of a duke staring haughtily out from beneath a crown that Alain had to laugh again.

"And speaking of juggling," Guy continued, "never miss a chance to practice — that's my motto."

He opened his pack and brought out a little silver ball, which he began to toss from one hand to the other until its orbit was a glittering circle in the air. Then, so quickly that the eye could hardly follow, his hands darted into the pack and added to the circle an orange, an apple, a little brass-handled knife, colored pebbles, a golden buckle, a pine cone. As these objects came into it the circle grew larger, until presently it was like a solid wheel spinning in the air on an invisible axle, with Guy's hands doing no more than flicking its rim to keep it in motion. Then the wheel began to grow smaller again as the objects dropped one by one back into the open pack, and at last only the orange was left. Suddenly it was gone. "A-maz-ing!" said Guy. "Didn't I have an orange here just a second ago? Did you see where it went?"

His expression of surprise seemed so genuine that Alain was quite taken in by it, and he began to search the ground anxiously with his eyes to see where the fruit had fallen. "*Here* it is," Guy said. "I knew it was somewhere around here —" and there it was in his hand again. "A bit dusty, though," he added thoughtfully. He began to rub it briskly between his palms, and as if made of water it melted away into nothing. "Ah, well, that's the way it is with oranges — now you have

it, now you don't. Aha! — what's this?" He shook his arm — and out of his sleeve popped the orange. "Smash my hat! — there it is again. I've got it this time!" and he clapped his hands around it as if capturing a very lively mouse. But instantly his face fell. "Bless my nose!" he cried, opening his hands and showing them quite empty. Suddenly he began to twist and squirm as if an insect were biting him between the shoulder blades. He tried to scratch with one hand, and then with the other, and wriggled his shoulders, and made such faces that Alain felt his own back itching. At last he plunged his hand down the back of his neck and said, "Ah!" with a great sigh of relief, and pulled out — the orange. Then he laughed until tears came to his eyes. "Oh, Tom, Tom," he gasped, "you should have seen yourself, staring away like any country bumpkin. Oh my cap and feather, what a sight!"

"But that was magic!" said Alain.

"Fah! — tricks, easy tricks. You could learn to do them yourself in a few months if you really wanted to. Here, eat the orange," he said, tossing it to Alain with a laugh. Then in a casual voice, "Would you like me to teach you how to do those tricks?"

"Oh, yes!" Alain said.

"Well, I might just do that, youngster. . . . How do you like the wandering life?"

"Not very much, so far," Alain admitted.

"You're not going about it the right way, then. The open

road, Tom," he said dreamily, "that's the real magic, following the road to see what the world will pull out of its sleeve next. Maybe it's a day hot enough to melt brass; but there's always a cool place like this one hidden away somewhere in it. Maybe it's a raining day, with the water flying sharp as flints, but there's always a warm dry place where you can creep in as cozy as a squirrel in a hole. If you're thirsty, and want a swim, there's a river waiting for you and greeting you with a flight of swallows. When you're hungry, there's a hedge of blackberries, or an orchard of ruddy apples, or a wood full of plump partridges and rabbits, just waiting to fall into your snare. If you want company, there are finches singing in every bush, and locusts buzzing like wires in the trees; or sometimes you fall in with gypsies or a wandering tinker, and you pass away the miles with jokes and songs and stories. You might happen by a farm in the evening when the cattle are homing through the mist and blue smoke is drifting out of the chimney and down along the edge of the night. You tell them the latest news, and sing them a ballad, and they give you a seat by the fire, and sweet milk in a pitcher, and crusty bread, and a soft bed in the hayloft where you can hear the owls hoo-hooing and lapwings crying as you fall asleep. And of all the dreams you ever dream, hayloft dreams are the fairest."

Alain, with the orange half-eaten and forgotten in his hand, listened as if he were in a dream himself.

"And the towns, Tom! They hold fairs and markets

there, and everything is as gay as April. There are splendid horses in trappings of silver and silk, and cows fat as butter, squadrons of white geese, fighting cocks strutting about; fine stuffs and jewels for sale, melons heaped high, baskets of grain, toys for the children; everyone laughing and singing and shouting. And in you go, right in the middle of it all, eyes feasting, ears cocked for a good joke, mouth watering when you pass the stalls where they are roasting fowls or baking cakes. Then you find a likely spot, and cry out, 'Heigh ho, heigh ho!' or blow a few notes on your fife, and then out with your juggling things — hey-day, soon they're spinning around like leaves in a whirlwind! How everyone crowds around then, gaping and full of wonderment, and how they all roar when you crack your jokes and pretend that you can't keep your orange from running away and hiding! And how the coins come raining down into your pocket! — no one grudges them any more than they grudge their laughter. And often some merry fellows will carry you off to the tavern, and feast you with mutton and pastries and ale, and there are pranks and so much laughing that your sides ache from it. And next morning, off on the magic road again, on to the next town just over the hills or across the plain. Sometimes there are river cities or harbor cities, and down you go to the quayside where the ships lie moored. Did you ever sail on a ship, Tom?"

Alain shook his head.

"Ah, Tom, the sea — the sea and the rivers that lead down

to the sea! There's a royal road for you! And it's as free as this road we're next to now. Three songs, a handful of jokes, and a story or two will buy you a passage on any ship you choose. Yo heave ho and away down the river! With the sails full of wind and the flags aflutter and the sailors singing the new songs you've just taught them. There are the gulls wheeling around the masthead, as white as hope against the sky, all screaming 'goodspeed, goodspeed!' Then the sapphire sea, and porpoises rolling and sounding alongside, and a white wake spinning out astern as if the course you sailed were made of silver and milk. At night there's a gold platter of moon making charcoal shadows on deck, and more stars than there are dewdrops glimmering on morning meadows. How quiet she sails then, with a creak and a rustle, listening for the song the sirens sing."

He was silent, still staring dreamily up at the treetops. Alain felt such a yearning, such a great empty ache of desire, that he could hardly breathe. No one had ever spoken to him like this before. Nothing had ever called him with such an enchanted whisper as this magic world of Guy's. And it was like hearing a voice in a dream when Guy said, "I'll tell you, Tom, I've been looking for an assistant. You said you'd like to learn my tricks. Come along with me, then, and I'll teach you what I know, and we'll wander the world together."

"Ah!" Alain murmured, scarcely daring to believe what he heard.

"Will you come?"

"Yes. Oh, yes!" he said as if in a dream.

"Heigh ho for the good companions of the road!" Guy shouted, jumping to his feet. "Come along, then!" He pulled Alain up and clapped him on the shoulder, and in a moment they were on the road, headed for the promise just around the next bend.

But what was it that hung so heavy over Alain? Why was it, with Guy singing fa la la as merry as a linnet, that he could feel no answering joy? Something nagged and ragged at him through his dreaming and desire, something dragged about his walking feet and would not let his heart lift. . . . Hook! The remembrance fell on him like a dash of chill water.

"Wait, Guy, wait!" he cried. "I already have a companion, and I forgot him somehow."

"Can't he take care of himself?"

"Oh, yes, he's stout as oakwood — it's not that —"

"Can he juggle and sing? Can he make the miles pass and the hours slip by with jokes and stories? Does he know where the ships lie waiting by the quays?"

"No. I don't know. It isn't that —"

"Ah, never mind him, then! The world's waiting for us."

"But wait!" Alain cried, nearly in tears. "He helped me when I was in trouble, and I just can't walk off now like this. Can't we wait until he comes back, so I can thank him, anyway, and then go on?"

"Listen, Tom — do you hear that little breeze in the grass? Do you hear how it whispers 'come, come,' and do you see how it goes where it will, seeking what it longs for without looking back and without stopping by the way? You don't stop once you've put your foot on the road, because the world's waiting, and it won't wait forever. The ships sail away while you linger, the stalls at the fair are taken down and folded away while you dawdle. There are some enchantments that happen only once and never come again."

And Alain stood in the road, while indecision pulled him this way and that. Through his mind flashed contrasting pictures of the life he had with Hook and the life that Guy had described. In despair he cried out to himself, "But I never *asked* to go with Hook! All I ever wanted —" But he couldn't tell what he wanted. He only knew, try as he might to argue it away, what was the right thing to do.

It seemed his heart would crack within him, but he cried out, "Go on your way, Guy, thank you, and goodspeed! I don't know where my companion is going, but I owe him a great deal, and I'll see him through to the end."

"So," Guy said slowly. "Be it that way, then, if it must be." And looking straight into Alain's eyes he added, "Here's a talisman for you to keep you on your journey:

"Who bears a steadfast heart gives others heart;
Who leaves his friends may prosper,
but he prospers ill."

And so good luck to you, Tom!" And without another word or a backward glance, he took his way down the road, whistling as he went.

Alain went back to where the bundles lay on the ground under the beeches, and sat down to wait as before, feeling sad, as if something precious had floated by him on the waters of a stream while he had stayed his hand from reaching for it. But when Hook returned at sundown, he felt better about not having gone away. It was a funny sort of feeling, not very joyful, but good somehow. And once again, while they ate an onion for supper, he thought he saw Hook smiling to himself.

VI

The Dapple Doe

They traveled two more weeks along the road, sleeping where they could at night and hiding from the soldiers who scoured by several times every day.

Now that Alain was not thinking of himself so much, he thought and wondered about Hook. Who was he? Where was he going? Why did he bother with a companion at all, since he seemed to have nothing to say? Why did he hide from the soldiers? — had he committed a crime? Why had he smiled when Alain made his decision not to cry over himself any more, and again when Alain had realized that he was glad

not to have gone off with Guy? Had Hook known or guessed somehow what was going on in his mind? And if so, how? Wasn't it odd, too, that Hook had just happened to be in the crowd when Alain had escaped from Fenn? And that he, Alain, should look so much like a certain Tom that Hook would not listen when he said that he *wasn't* Tom?

These questions haunted and puzzled Alain by the hour, so that he quite forgot the heavy bundle galling his shoulder. But he could find no answer to any of them.

At the end of the two weeks, something came up to drive all idle questions from his mind. One evening when they had settled down in a warm dry hollow in a meadow, Hook reached as usual in his bundle for their supper. A look of surprise came over his face, and he plunged his hand deeper into the pack. Then he frowned and rummaged all the way to the bottom. But his hand came out empty.

"Well, Tom," he said, "no supper this night, I'm afraid. Now I would have sworn that there was at least a turnip left to us. Maybe we'll come by something tomorrow."

Alain had been hungry ever since they had taken to the road: an apple or a piece of bread twice a day is very scanty fare to travel on. But now, without even that to stay him, his hunger became sharp indeed, and he had trouble going to sleep.

It was a particularly wild country they had reached by this time — great barren heaths and moorlands as lonely as a

desert. No one lived here. Even the soldiers were no longer seen riding the road. Hook and Alain traveled all day without seeing an orchard, or a cultivated plot, or even a patch of wild berries. About midday they came across a runnel of water, enough to drink from, but too small to have in it even the tiniest of fish.

Alain was really beginning to feel the pinch now. As he trudged along, visions of food began to torment him. He remembered the great feasts that used to be held at the castle: tables sagging under the weight of immense tureens of soup, heaps of bread and pastries, mounds of fruit, wheels of cheese, platters overflowing with baked fish. Whenever a stick snapped under his foot he thought of the sound of roasting spits in the castle kitchens, with oxen turning on them, or whole ranks of fowls head to tail, and fat dripping into the embers with a pop and sizzle.

He remembered the hams and the strings of onions hanging from the kitchen beams, the baskets of grain, the bins of apples and raisins, the eggs in straw-filled boxes. He remembered one of Fenn's merry tunes—the one where his brother would wait in ambush and hurl a rotten pear at him as he went by. And he thought, with his stomach grinding and complaining, how he could welcome such an indignity now, if only enough of the mushy pulp could be kept from falling to the ground. "Yes," he thought lightheadedly, "I would thank Fenn for that now, and beg him to hit me with another one,

and I would chew on the stem and crack the seeds between my teeth. . . ."

They camped that night on the edge of a dark wood, and went to sleep supperless again. All night long Alain tossed and dreamed of food. Sometimes in these dreams he was eating as fast as he could through huge dinners without ever getting enough. At other times he dreamed that he was in a locked cell, watching while Fenn on the other side of the grate would slowly take a bite from a juicy pie, and then drop the rest of it to the ground and trample on it. When he awoke in the morning, the gnawing ache in his stomach was so sharp that he felt faint, and he had to seize a stick and chew on it in the hope that it might help somehow.

"Poor Hook!" he thought, watching his companion still twisting and muttering in his sleep. "He's had no more to eat than I've had all this while, and yet he's twice my size. He could eat three times as much as I usually do, and still be hungry. And yet he's always given me half of what he had, and never begrudged it."

A surge of gratitude broke through the misery of his hunger, and he jumped up thinking, "I *must* find something to eat, and I will. Surely there must be mushrooms somewhere near by, or nuts, or a bird's nest with eggs in it. And Hook may have all he wants, and leave me the rest, no matter how little."

He rushed out on the moor, lightheadedly thinking it

certain that they had passed something edible yesterday without seeing it. "It could very easily happen," he mumbled to himself. "How surprised he'll be to see me returning with a pocketful of berries! *Must* be a berry bush around here. Didn't Guy say there were berry bushes by the roads?" He wandered aimlessly for an hour, obsessed with the idea of berry bushes, but finding nothing except brambles and heather.

At last he returned in a desperate frame of mind, and found Hook building a fire.

"So, Tom, you've been out looking, I see. Well, there's more than one way around this problem. While you've been racing around the moor, I've been in the woods setting a snare."

Guy had mentioned snares too; and Alain was so abashed at having forgotten this simple solution that he hung his head.

"If you want to make yourself useful," Hook went on, "you'll take this knife, and you'll go up that little pathway there until you reach the end of it, and if there's anything in the snare, you'll cut its throat and bring it back. Meanwhile, I'll make up the fire. And look here, Tom," as he stared piercingly into Alain's eyes and handed him the knife, "I get into a bad mood when I'm hungry — so don't make any mistakes."

"Trust me," said Alain. "I'm too hungry to make any mistakes."

He seized the knife and rushed into the wood. But suddenly he checked himself in mid-flight. "Ah, you fool," he thought angrily, "here you are making a mistake already! If

you go crashing along like this you'll frighten whatever may be in the snare, and make it pull away." So he crept up the path like an assassin, holding his knife ready to spring and stab, while his stomach griped and quivered at the thought of having something to eat at last.

There *was* something caught. At the end of the path was a tiny clearing, lit by single shaft of sunlight, and something large lay quietly on the ground there. Alain's heart leaped within him like a pounding fist. He gave a cry of triumph and rushed forward with his knife poised.

But then at the last instant he stopped. It was a dapple doe that lay there, a creature pied with gold and amber, as lovely as sunlight and shadow. She lay quite still where the snare had brought her down, neither struggling nor crying out. But her entangled legs shook with the rapid quivering of fear. She had twisted her head around toward Alain, and it was the imploring look in her eyes, dark as dusk and wet with terror, that stopped his rush and transfixed him there with his mouth open and his knife still hanging in the air. "Mercy," the eyes pleaded, "have mercy!"

"I didn't think of this," he muttered, and, sick at heart, he turned away his eyes and let the knife fall by his side. But the instant his eyes looked away from hers, a vision came to him of pieces of meat on a stick, turning and browning over a fire, and a stab of hunger cramped his stomach. "Ah, there's no help for it!" he thought desperately. "If I don't kill her, we'll

starve!" And quickly, so as not to lose his nerve, he whirled on the doe and lifted his knife. But once again her eyes froze him before he could strike.

"Little doe," he said, and the words burst out of his tightened throat like a sob, "we are dying of hunger! I wouldn't kill you from cruelty, but we're starving! I can't help it — we're starving!"

But the eyes only answered, "Have mercy."

He could not strike. Once more the knife dropped by his side and he turned away his head. And immediately he saw those pieces of meat again, roasting over the fire, and heard the sizzle of fat dripping into the flames, and smelled the rich brown odor mingling with the wood smoke. Suddenly a crafty thought came to him: "Her eyes! It's her eyes that stop me. But if I look the other way while I stab, I won't see them; and when she is dead, they will close and I won't have to look at them any more." He set his teeth and raised the knife again, and stared away from the doe toward the opposite side of the clearing.

Then he noticed for the first time that they were not alone. There was a fawn on the other side of the clearing, so young that it still bore white specklings on its body, like unmelted flakes from a snow flurry. It stood as still as a carved stone, with one foot raised, its ears swung forward, and its fearful eyes staring straight into Alain's own. Those eyes also pleaded for mercy, as plain as speech.

"Go away!" Alain hissed. "Get away from here!" The fawn did not move. "I could chase it," Alain thought. But no — it was clear that no matter how far he might chase it, it would come back to watch and plead. For some minutes he stood there irresolute, maddened by hunger but torn also by pity, while his knife wavered in the air.

"Oh, hang it!" he half cried, half sobbed at last. "This is too much, too much! Why do you plague me so? I can't stand it either way!" He turned on the doe, slashing downward with the knife — and cut the noose that bound her legs. She soared to her feet as gracefully as one leaps in a dream, and turned to face him from the middle of the clearing. "Get out of here!" Alain sobbed. "Get away from me!"

And then, in a voice as quiet as water flowing from a silver pitcher, the doe said, "Here is a talisman to keep you on your journey:

"Who bears mercy in his heart is forever blessed;
Who heeds not pity may prosper, but he prospers ill."

And she and her fawn vanished into the wood, while Alain stood gaping.

"Ah, my head's gone queer," he whispered. He began to trudge back along the path, and panic gathered in him at the thought of having to tell Hook what had passed. " 'Don't make any mistakes,' he said. 'Trust me,' I said. Oh, he'll be raving mad! I know — I'll tell him there was nothing in the snare.

No, I'll tell him there was something, but it got away. No, I'll tell him — oh, I don't know, I don't know!" His head was swimming so much that it really didn't seem to matter any more what happened. And yet his legs were shaking when at last he stood before Hook.

"Well?" said Hook, glancing up fiercely from the fire, "was the snare empty?"

Alain wanted to say yes, but the word stuck in his throat. "No," he mumbled, "it wasn't empty. There was a dapple doe in it."

"Where is she then? Did she get away from you?"

Again Alain wanted to say yes, and again he could not. "No," he said. "She was well caught. I — I let her go."

"Let her go!" Hook exclaimed, getting to his feet and clenching his fists.

"Ah, Hook, she had such a look in her eyes, and there was a fawn with her, and I took pity on her, I couldn't help it. . . . I don't care!" he cried, hurling the knife to the ground. "I'll eat grass first!" The swimming in his head turned into a fog that swirled around him with a low roaring noise, and he fell to the ground in a faint.

When he regained consciousness, he found himself warmly wrapped in Hook's cloak. The fire was burning, and a little pot hanging over it bubbled away and sent out a heavenly smell of soup.

"Forgive me, Tom," Hook said. "I've put you to all that

pain and trouble, and I'm sorry for it. And here all the while I had some carrots and onions and things tangled up in a spare shirt in my bundle where I couldn't find them!"

So they fell to on the soup and feasted as royally as any two kings. And Alain saw (he was sure of it this time) that Hook smiled that mysterious smile to himself again.

VII

The Gypsy Lad

They left the barren heath and soon came into farming country again, where Hook obtained more food for them. And they journeyed on the road for several more weeks.

The bundle Alain carried no longer galled his shoulder, and his legs were hardening to the many miles they traveled every day. He had stopped thinking about his own troubles, and had just about given up the useless business of asking himself questions about Hook. He looked around him as they journeyed, and for the first time began to notice the beauty

of the world. He smelled the sweet morning air as it stirred out of its night's sleep and gathered a chill freshness from the dew. The cold air stung his nose, and yet it was a pleasure to be so stung, and he breathed as deeply as he could. His eyes, no longer fixed on the dust of the road, followed the steel-blue glint and flash of swallows in the sunlight, or watched the gathering of clouds like flocks of sheep over distant azure hills, or caught the bounces of white as rabbits dived into the roadside bushes. His ears were sharpening, too — he would hear the tiny rustle of mice in the dead leaves, and think, "Why, I must have been deaf! Why did I never notice that before?" Each day brought fresh discoveries. His spirits rose until he could not contain them, and he would burst out whistling or singing, while Hook smiled.

But as the weeks passed by, he began to notice also that something was not right with the world. Why, for instance, did they begin to pass more and more silent farms? The farm houses seemed deserted, or at least tightly shut up, and no smoke came out of their chimneys. Here were neglected fields, with crops unharvested and beginning to rot. Sheep were gone from the pastures, meadows grew rank with no cattle to graze them. They saw only a few chickens, and those were far afield where they had no right to be, picking wild and shy as pheasants. An air of doom and blight hung over all these places. What was wrong?

And the soldiers — they were more numerous day by day.

Sometimes Hook and Alain had to hide from them every two hours as they swept along the road like ill-omened hawks. Peeping out from a sheltering hedge or ditch, Alain began to notice that the soldiers led strings of horses with them, or drove cattle before them, goading them along with their swords. Frequently there were prisoners, too, men bound hand and foot and slung over the horses like so much baggage. And Alain had so far forgotten his old life that he did not for many days realize what was happening. But it came to him at last, the only possible explanation: Fenn. His brother was carrying out his old threat; the merry tunes had begun, now that he was king, and the "vermin" were learning how to dance to them.

Hook and Alain began to meet other wayfarers on the road now — old farmers and their wives weeping as they walked, and their children with pinched and starveling faces. These traveled with a slow and hopeless pace as if they were lost. But when the soldiers burst into sight over the crest of the hill or around a bend in the road, they scattered in frightened silence to either side, and flung themselves into whatever hiding places they could find. Whenever Hook talked to them, he got the same story. The new king was going to launch a great war against a neighboring kingdom. All the able-bodied men were being seized and pressed into service as soldiers. Taxes were being raised, too, and those who could not pay them were turned out of their farms, sometimes beaten, and their horses and cattle seized. The soldiers swarmed over the countryside, doing what

they pleased; every now and then they burned down a farmhouse for the sake of a little excitement.

So Alain had discovered the world only to find it made miserable, as the castle had been, by his brother. He did not whistle or sing any more. Sorrow settled on his shoulders as heavy as his bundle had once been, and sometimes such an anger welled up in his heart that he would shake with it as if he had a fever. Once the thought came to him, "Well, at least Hook and I are free from this business." The thought gave him no comfort, but only a dreadful feeling of shame. And the shame persisted until he could hardly bear it. One evening, when they had camped for the night on the edge of a forest, shame and sorrow and anger became so heavy in his heart that he groaned aloud.

"What ails you, Tom?" Hook asked.

"Ah, Hook, it hurts me that we should wander the world free while these people suffer so."

"Oh? And do you wish to suffer also, to keep them company?"

"No, it's not that I want to suffer . . . I was just learning what it was to be happy these last weeks, and I much prefer happiness. But now I can't be happy when I see what is happening. I want to help these people, but I don't know what to do. And I feel ashamed of being so helpless, and so free myself."

"Is it not a good thing to be free?" Hook asked.

"Yes . . . but—" Alain thought a while, and then asked, "but can we be really free when they are not?"

"Aha!" said Hook, giving him a keen glance. "There have been many men who have asked that same question."

"And what was their answer?"

"Each one had to find his own answer. But look here, Tom, we need some water. I see a fire in the forest there—some charcoal burner or woodsman probably, and he may give us some. Will you take the pot and ask him?"

So Alain took the pot and set out through the dusk-dimmed forest in a thoughtful mood. Each one had to find his own answer. This would need some thinking about. He trudged along, turning it over in his mind. He had thought he was free of Fenn; but Fenn still had the power to hurt him by hurting other people, and this was somehow a worse pain than any he had felt in the castle; so he wasn't free of Fenn after all. . . . Well, it was very puzzling. But Alain felt that the answer was just around the corner in his brain somewhere.

By this time he had reached the fire and stood in the shadows just outside its small circle of light. A gypsy-looking fellow was crouched over the flames: a young fellow about Alain's size, very ragged and unclean, with a surly set to his shoulders. His face was hidden in shadow, but what could be seen of him was so unpromising that Alain hesitated. However, there was nothing to be gained by standing about in the dark; so at last he stood forth in the firelight, held out the

pot, and said, "Please, I should like some water if you have any to spare."

"You clear out of here," the gypsy snarled. "Find your own water." He said this still hunched over the fire. But now, suddenly, he looked up so that the flickering light fell full on his face. Alain jumped back with a cry of terror. It was Fenn's face that confronted him.

Almost in the same instant he saw that he was mistaken. But what an easy mistake to make! This fellow had the same twisted nose, the same pulled-up lip, the same cruel sneer. The resemblance was so close that Alain felt the old terrible feeling of his castle days — the desire to run and the hopeless terror freezing his legs.

"Here, you," said the gypsy, "let's have a look at you. Come here." He stood up and came for Alain with the crouching tense gait of a cat stalking a bird. Like Fenn, he was half a head taller than Alain; and his hands had the appearance of vicious strength. Alain stepped back. His foot caught on a rock, and he stumbled backward and fell. In a second the gypsy had pounced on him and dragged him back into the firelight. His face twisted even further into a sneering smile as he examined his captive.

"Oh my, oh my," he said, in a sort of purring snarl, "here's an unmannerly one! Got no feeling at all for the proper way to go about things. A-coming in out of the dark and asking for water! I call that unmannerly, I do."

"Let me go," Alain gasped.

" 'Let me go,' " the gypsy mocked in a high falsetto. "Oh my, oh my! A-begging to be let go of, and won't even say 'please.' That's unmannerly, that is. Shocking ill-bred, *I* call it. Let's hear you say 'please,' you vagabond."

"Let — go — of — me!" Alain said, struggling.

"Unmannerly *and* obstinate," said the gypsy in mock sorrow. "Wouldn't that make a stone weep, now?" Suddenly he thrust his face close to Alain's. "Look here, you loafer, I like to be addressed as 'sir,' you understand? That's good manners, that is, to call your betters 'sir.' So let's just hear you say 'please, sir,' in a nice respectful tone of voice."

Alain clamped his mouth shut and continued to struggle.

"You're a-going to be taught some manners, you are," the gypsy snarled. "That's what I'm a master of, teaching manners, and I love my work. When I get through teaching a vagabond, that vagabond knows what's right, and he knows what's wrong, and he knows how to speak to his betters in a respectful way. Now you just say 'please, sir,' or we'll start out with lesson number one on good manners." And the gypsy drew back a clenched fist.

This was Alain's chance, now that there was only one hand holding him. He made a quick, eel-like twist and wriggle, flinging his whole weight backwards at the same time, and was free. The gypsy cursed, made an off-balance grab for him, and missed. Alain darted into the sheltering darkness of the forest

like a mouse fleeing from an owl.

He ran for several minutes before he realized that he was not being chased. At any rate, he could hear no footsteps crashing through the undergrowth after his own. Perhaps the gypsy was silently stalking him. If so, Alain was helping him by all this blundering noise. He stopped then, putting a tree trunk between himself and the fire, which could still faintly be seen like a spark in the distant gloom. He listened, straining to hear the slightest noise above the thudding of his own heart. Not a sound. Either the gypsy was as quiet as a hunting weasel, or he was not coming at all. For ten minutes Alain crouched tensely. Still no sound. He was not being followed, then. He was free to go as he pleased.

He began to trudge back to his own camp. His fear left him slowly, but there was no feeling of relief to replace it—only a bitter taste in his mouth, as if he had chewed on something poisonous. Not only had he failed to get the water, but he had left the pot there by the gypsy's fire, where it had fallen during the struggle. "Manners!" he raged. "Wait till I tell Hook about that! Hook will teach him manners! Hook—" But the more he thought and raged, the more bitter did the taste in his mouth become. At last he stopped short and stood in the darkness with his face fevered with shame.

"No," he thought, burning and dry-mouthed, "no. It's not Hook's business. It's mine. I've been bullied by a gypsy, and I ran away, and Hook has nothing to do with it. I ran away."

He heard Hook's voice saying, "Each one has to find his own answer." And the answer that had been in his own mind when he was coming for the water, the answer that was hiding there waiting for discovery—now he had found it. "Yes!" he thought. "Fenn can still hurt me, and he can hurt the farmers, and he can hurt anyone who runs away. And the more we run away, the more he will want to hurt us, because he likes to see people running from him. And I will never be free, and they will never be free, until we stop running. So I will stop running now."

Then the fear began to come back to him, and he swallowed. "That means I must go back and have it out with the gypsy," he thought miserably. And for many minutes he stood there in the darkness, hanging between shame and fright. "Ah, why am I plagued and pestered with these choices?" he thought in desperation. "Why can't I be let alone?" He rubbed his face with his hands, took a deep tremulous breath, and turned back towards the gypsy's fire.

The fellow was still sitting hunched over his fire as before, but looking, if anything, more evil-visaged than ever as the blood-red light flickered across his twisted nose and mouth. Alain's legs shook under him, and the racing of his heart would scarcely let him breathe. But he stepped into the light nevertheless, and said with a trembling voice, "I want my pot back. I won't say please, and I won't say sir."

"Ahhh," said the gypsy, standing up and smiling with a

cruel pleasure. "You're a-coming back to take my lessons in good manners, eh? Aren't you the little gamecock, though?"

As best he could, Alain put down the urge to run. He swallowed several times before he could say, "You're a ruffian. Give me my pot."

The gypsy sprang then, with his fist whirling out like a hammer. Alain ducked, but not quite fast enough. His head felt as if a cannon had exploded inside it. He had the impression of sparks in a whirlwind, bells tolling, and the great pouring sound of a waterfall. He was on the ground. The gypsy stood back, sneering and rubbing his fist in his other hand.

"That's lesson number one, that is. That's the easy lesson. Lesson number two comes harder. There's lots of my students that find lesson number two very hard to learn. Oh, they have to take real pains with number two, they do."

A voice in Alain's swimming head said, "Run! Roll out into the darkness and run!" "I won't," he mumbled. "I've finished with running." He staggered to his feet, still mumbling, "I won't, I won't." The gypsy circled around him, lightfooted, crookedly smiling. Alain crouched, and launched himself at the fellow with all the strength he could muster.

He was on the ground again, and somehow all the wind had been knocked out of him and he was fighting to get it back into his aching empty chest. Through his gasping he could hear the gypsy's voice, fading in and out from a whisper to a loud triumphant sneer and back again to a whisper: "Oh, I'm

a-being easy on you, I am. That lesson number two is usually a clincher, but I taught it gentle this time, I did. Now you just say 'please, sir,' and spare yourself some trouble, because I won't go so easy on lesson number three."

"Won't," Alain said, sobbing for breath. "I won't, I won't." A cunning voice seemed to be whispering in his ear — if he could only hear it! What was it saying? *"Grapple with him. He can hit and you can't — wrestle with him, pin his arms. . . ."* If only he could get his breath back! But he couldn't wait for that — he would have to act now. Now! With a shove of one leg he writhed his body over the ground, reaching out with both hands at the same time. He had the gypsy by the foot. He pulled and twisted, rolling over as he did so. Down came the gypsy with a cry.

They thrashed about on the ground, locked in each other's grip. Alain had made the right move — now that the gypsy could not lash out with his fist they were more evenly matched. Alain would never have believed that his own arms had such strength in them; but he had been carrying his bundle for many weeks now, and his muscles had been hardening without his realizing it. His breath was coming back as they rolled and grappled, and with it the force of his grip increased. The gypsy was trying to get at his throat. Alain seized the groping hand and pushed. It was yielding, yielding . . . slowly the gypsy's arm bent back like a tough springy sapling under Alain's grip. A fierce joy exploded in his heart. He was holding his own!

The gypsy was grunting, he heaved and writhed like a pinioned snake — but he was giving way, inch by painful inch he was giving way. So they rolled and strained, teeth clenched, breath sobbing, arms and legs entwined and striving each to each. And every time Alain was on top, he stayed there a little longer than before.

The end was quite sudden. The gypsy's flailing foot happened to land in the fire. He gave a yelp of pain and twisted away from the heat. In that moment of inattention Alain seized the fellow's wrists and forced them back behind his head, back and down to the ground. In the next instant he was astride his enemy and had him pinned helpless.

But what strange thing was this? The firelight fell on the

gypsy's face and showed it smiling! — not the evil twisted smile like Fenn's, but a pleased and happy smile, as if he were glad to be beaten. And he said, "Here is a talisman to keep you on your journey:

"Who bears courage in his heart bears a golden shield;
Who plays the coward may prosper, but he prospers ill."

Strange and yet more strange! No wonder that Alain should sit as if petrified, with his eyes starting from his head. It was not a gypsy that he held captive under him, but Hook! — Hook, who smiled so broadly that it seemed his jaws must crack, and who said, "Well done, Prince Alain, well done! Now let me up, please."

VIII

Hook Explains

Alain got up in an utter speechless daze. Hook rose and brushed himself, grinning the while and saying, "*What* a wildcat you turned out to be after all! *What* a gamecock!" And he clapped Alain on the shoulder and looked at him with his steel-blue eyes shining with pride, as a father might look at a favorite son who has lived up to his fondest expectations. "*What* a sturdy rough-and-tumbler! Ah, you deserve the name of prince now!"

"Who — who are you, anyway?" Alain finally managed to stammer.

"Ah," said Hook, still smiling hugely, "let's say I'm your guardian genius — or your good angel, if you prefer. And if anyone on earth ever needed a guardian genius, it was you. Here, let me show you something." He led Alain around to the other side of the fire and pointed to the ground. There was Alain's bundle, big and lumpy on the ground. "Pick it up, Alain," Hook said.

So Alain picked it up, and it lifted in his arms as easily as a small bundle of rags might.

"What do you think is in it?" Hook asked.

"Why, I — I don't know," said Alain. And it was true — he had never once opened the bundle, but had just accepted it as something he must bear on his shoulder.

"Empty it out," Hook said. "See what Alain couldn't carry, and what Tom learned to carry."

Alain upended the bundle and shook it. To his amazement a great heap of rocks fell clattering to the ground. They were all most unlovely to look at. There were black ones all sharp with angles, like flint or volcanic glass; a few dirty white and yellow ones, like pieces of the fungus that grows on the dank dark underside of logs; grey ones of horrid shape, as if they had been half-melted and tortured and twisted, and allowed to harden again.

"You've been staggering under those all your life, and didn't know it," Hook said. "There — those are your fears — those are your self-pity — that one's your cowardice — there's

the hatred you nursed along — there's your blindness — that's your want of spirit . . . It's not your fault that such hideous things were piled on your back. But you can stand up under them now, instead of crawling and whining, so you're through with them." And he kicked the rocks out into the dark until none were left.

Alain was still in a dizzy whirl, and not knowing what to say, he said the first thing that came to his mind: "You knew who I was all the time?"

"Yes."

"But you called me Tom —"

"I had my reasons. That was no prince I found in the streets, but a frightened running rabbit; and one may call a rabbit by any name. Nothing like a change of name to start a change of heart! Do you remember yourself in those days?"

"Ah, yes, yes . . ." Alain said, shaking his head in shame and wonder at the memory of a pale, unattractive boy who had crept about the castle cowering and trembling like — Hook's term was a good one — like a rabbit, a spiritless rabbit.

"Now, look at yourself," said Hook, pulling a little looking glass out of his pocket and giving it to him. It was a shock, although a most pleasant one, to see in that mirror how he had changed. "Can this be me?" he marveled, looking at his brown face, seeing how lean and strong and confident it was, how direct the gaze of the eyes in the glass as they looked into his own.

"The old Alain had to become someone else, you see," said Hook, "and Tom was as good a name as any for that someone. And that someone had to become a man before he could call himself Prince Alain again; and he *did* become a man, and I'm proud of him for it!"

"Ah, Hook! Hook!" Alain said, laughing, yet with a catch in his throat that was close to crying too, "I — I don't know what to say — this has been your doing, and I don't know how to thank you —"

"No thanks!" Hook said, raising his hand. "It's thanks enough to me, and more, to see what you have become. And now there is one more thing to show you. Come along!"

They walked through the night-black forest together. Hook laid his hand on Alain's shoulder and squeezed it affectionately.

"Oh, he was quite a fellow, that Tom," he said. "Something of a whiner at first, but he got over that all right. I was very fond of him, but I couldn't show it as I wanted to, because of the tests he had to undergo. He had to undergo them by himself, you see, without leaning on me."

"Tests?" Alain said.

"Yes. For instance, there was a certain juggler . . ."

"Ah! — so you knew about that!"

"Surely — *I* was that juggler, by the help of a little magic. And I tempted you with everything I could think of, with my heart in my throat all the while, wondering, 'Will he do what

is right by old Hook, or will he follow this glib-tongued popinjay Guy and betray his loyalty?' And when you stood by Hook like a man I was so glad I could hardly keep myself from shouting out."

"And were you the dapple doe, too?"

"Yes, and the fawn besides; and both of me in a fine sweat the whole time, wondering whether hunger or mercy would win you in the end."

"Why, I might have killed you!" Alain cried in horror.

"Oh, no danger of that — I had my magic to protect me. The real danger was that you might have killed the compassion in your heart. But you played the man again. And I was so full of joy that I wanted to jump back into my own skin on the spot and hug you — but I couldn't give myself away yet because of the last test to come."

"And that was to fight with the gypsy, wasn't it? Ah," Alain said, laughing ruefully as he touched his head with one hand and his stomach with the other, "those were fierce clouts you gave me, Hook! — and you looking so much like Fenn that my heart was leaping mad with fright."

"And *my* heart was bleeding in me the whole while because I had to hurt you and frighten you. I thought to myself, 'Oh, this is a plaguey business, this of being guardian genius — it would be easier to be a villain outright than to do this to someone you love.' But you had your courage to find, you see, and I couldn't do otherwise. It needs no courage to stand up to a

pleasant-faced fellow who holds his punches back and keeps a civil tongue."

"Yes, I see that. Oh, it was worth it, Hook, and I'll thank you for it whether you will have my thanks or no."

Little gleams of light had been appearing in the forest before them as they walked, and Alain now saw that these were campfires, scores of them, winking and snapping in a large cleared place among the trees. There were men about these fires, gaunt men and ragged, hunger-pinched, but all with a determined air about them. Silently they worked by firelight, some sharpening knives, some making arrows, some fashioning cudgels from the branches of trees.

"Who are these?" Alain whispered.

Hook countered with a question of his own. "You ran away from the gypsy at first, but then you came back. Why?"

"Because I thought to myself that I would never be free of Fenn, or anything I was afraid of, as long as I ran away. So I decided to stop running."

"These are men who have thought the same thing. They want to be free of Fenn also, and they know that they will never be so as long as they run. So they are going to fight. Alain, you have carried your burden like a man. You have eaten the food that common men eat, and you have thrived on it. You have learned to see the beauty of the world. You have learned loyalty and compassion and courage. These are good things for a king to know."

"King?" said Alain, wondering.

"Yes. Those men are waiting for just one thing — they are waiting for you to lead them against Fenn, and to overthrow him and to become king yourself."

"But how do they know about me?"

"Oh, they know about you — I told them."

"To fight against Fenn . . ." Alain said doubtfully.

"He's afraid of you, you know."

"Afraid of *me*?"

"Certainly. A bully is always a little afraid of the one he bullies. Why do you think we had to hide from the soldiers all this time? They were looking for you — Fenn will never breathe easy until he captures you. The thing to do is to capture *him*. Will you do it?"

Alain looked at the ragtag and bobtail men in the clearing, and at their poor knives and sticks and crude arrows. And he thought of Fenn's soldiers on their warhorses, armored and shielded, with their lances and swords. Pain and pride swelled in his heart.

"Ah, Hook! — can such as these stand up to the king's soldiers?"

"As well as you stood up to a mad and snarling gypsy."

"And if I go, will you go with me?"

"Yes, I will be with you. But I will only be as they are, a strong arm and a willing heart, for I have no more magic to help you."

"It will not be easy," Alain muttered.

"No," said Hook, "it will not be easy."

"But," Alain said, drawing a deep breath, "I will do it."

Hook clapped him on the shoulder, and said no more, but led him into the firelight. And the men jumped up, shouting until the trees rang with echoes, "Long live Prince Alain!"

IX

The End Of Fenn's Merry Tunes

And it was not easy. The situation was as desperate as it could be, short of hopelessness. The men were starving, and knew little of the ways of warfare. They were greatly outnumbered. Such weapons as they already had or could make seemed hardly enough to fight wolves, let alone experienced soldiers. Hook looked grim, and Alain was frequently sick with discouragement. Particularly at night, while the men tossed and cried out in their sleep, and he himself lay sleepless and staring into the dark, he would think, "I wish I were out of this. . . . I wish I could forget about it. . . . I wish

it were all over." But always, at the blackest moment, he remembered his first talisman:

Who bears a steadfast heart gives others heart;
Who leaves his friends may prosper,
but he prospers ill.

So he acted as cheerful as he could during the day, and encouraged his men as if there were no doubt that they would win in the end. His acting was successful with them. He gave them heart, even though his own heart was full of foreboding.

Many tales could be told of months of preparation and of their march on the castle, and each would be long and unpleasant. Every battle was terribly close, and Alain never went into one without a dreadful feeling of fear. His talisman,

Who bears courage in his heart bears a golden shield;
Who plays the coward may prosper, but he prospers ill,

was the only thing that kept him going. And he never finished a battle without feeling ill, for the sight of broken heads and wounded bodies is not pretty. But his band grew larger day by day. Farmers came to join them, bringing food, and men who had been captured and forced into Fenn's army deserted to Alain's side, bringing with them stolen horses loaded with weapons. And good fortune favored them at last when they marched on the castle itself. Fenn had been playing his merry tunes to the townspeople as well as the countrymen, and they

were weary of dancing to them. When they heard that Alain was approaching, they rose up in a great riot, and drove all the town soldiers into the castle. So the rebels entered the town without a fight, to the sounds of rejoicing and triumph.

And Alain rode up to the castle at the head of his men, and looked at the window he had jumped out of so long ago, and thought, "Well! — so I have come home again" — shaking his head because he could hardly believe that the terrible fighting was almost over at last.

But Hook frowned at the sight of the drawbridge pulled up and the great iron bars in all the windows, and said, "That will be a tough nut to crack! Fenn's in there as snug as a fox in its den."

"Foxes can be dug out," said Alain grimly. "Ah, Hook, I've suffered so in that place that I'm half of a mind to destroy it entirely. But then, it's not the castle's fault. Well, we shall have to dig them out, and make the place clean again."

"We could starve them out."

"No, no, I hate this business — let's finish it as quickly as possible. Bring up the siege engines."

So siege engines were hauled into position, and the whole town shook to the crash of huge boulders being hurled against the castle. For two days and nights the gate and the drawbridge that was pulled up to cover it were battered with a steady bombardment as merciless as the pounding of the sea against its shore. Then the bridge tore away from its hinges and fell

into the moat, and the iron-bound gate bent and burst inward.

Alain's men came forward under a roof of shields to protect them from the arrows that poured from the castle, and they pushed a temporary bridge of planks across the moat. Then Alain led the charge across, shouting, "Here is your brother, Fenn! Here is the Sniveler! Come, welcome him home!" An arrow gashed his cheek open, but he hardly felt it. For the first time he was going into battle with joy in his heart instead of anxiety and fright. His sword flashed before him as he burst into the courtyard, and he cried, "Halloo, halloo!" until the stone walls rang. Hook, fighting by his side, growled, "Steady, young gamecock! There's what you're looking for, I think." He jerked his head toward the far side of the courtyard, where Alain, following the gesture, saw Fenn at last. There was nothing between them now but the castle guard.

And that barrier wavered before the furious onrush of the attackers. One by one the men of the guard fell, or dropped their weapons in the hope of mercy. Hook dealt with the last two himself, sweeping them down with one giant blow. The brothers were face to face. With an exultant cry, Alain raised his sword. But quick as he was, the other was quicker; and before the blow could fall, Fenn dropped his sword and fled.

Alain darted off after his brother's disappearing back. "How fast he runs!" Alain thought; "but he always was swift. Now we shall see if he is as good at running away from me as he used to be at running after me. Oh, don't stop, dear brother!"

— for Fenn had faltered an instant at the turning of a corridor — "Don't stop yet; I am just beginning to enjoy the chase!"

On and on they pounded, through the great hall, in and out of lesser chambers, through the classroom, down the empty echoing corridors; and at every turn and corner old memories came back. "There," Alain thought, "there he twisted my arm until I fainted . . . that's where he tied me with a rope and stuck hot needles into me . . . there he beat me with a cat o' nine tails that he stole from the armory . . . Run, Fenn, run! We have scores to settle, you and I, but I don't begrudge you a little chase. There is nowhere to hide where I cannot find you as well as you always found me."

On and on they ran through the kitchens and storerooms and the armory and the soldiers' quarters. Then Fenn began to flee upwards, and Alain could hear him pant as he took the stairs two and three at a time. Up and up they went, up broad stairs, then middling stairs, and finally up narrow winding stairs. "The tower!" Alain thought; "it always was one of his favorite places. Very well, Fenn, we will have another look at your 'vermin,' you and I." But before he reached the little doorway at the head of the stairs he paused and looked at the sword still glittering in his hand. "No," he thought, "let this be barehanded between the two of us." He sheathed the sword, climbed the remaining way, and stepped out onto the tower top, ready for anything.

But Fenn was not waiting to pounce and fight. Fenn was

writhing on the tiles of the tower top, and the twisted sneer was gone from his face, and white terror was set there in place of it.

"Get up, get up!" said Alain almost gaily. "I have something to show you."

But Fenn said nothing and continued to grovel on the tiles. There was something so shameful in the sight of his cowering that Alain could not bear to look at it. "Get up!" he snapped, and he seized his brother by the scruff of the neck and hauled him to his feet and dragged him over to the parapet. "You always liked to look down, didn't you?" he said. "Have one last look!"

The streets around the castle were black with people. When Alain's head and Fenn's appeared over the edge of the parapet, an angry rumbling murmur broke out below.

"Look well at your 'vermin,'" Alain said. "You used to say how fond you were of learning from humble creatures. Listen and learn now! Do you hear that shouting? It says that the vermin do not think of themselves as vermin, but as human beings. It says that they are tired of your merry tunes, and that they have one or two merry tunes of their own that they want you to learn. Would you like to hear them? Shall I turn you over to those music masters, and let them teach you the art of dancing?"

Fenn trembled, and his white face worked, and at last he croaked, "Don't — please don't —"

"Oh, no," said Alain, pulling him away from the parapet.

"No, they will have to do without that pleasure. Because I intend to finish you myself."

His fingers closed around Fenn's throat, and a terrible joy sang in his brain. "Ah," he thought, "this is how the cat feels when it has caught a rat. This is the hawk's sweet pleasure when it has a snake in its talons . . ." But as his grip tightened, he seemed to hear a quiet voice saying:

> *Who bears mercy in his heart is forever blessed;*
> *Who heeds not pity may prosper, but he prospers ill.*

For many minutes Alain stood there holding his brother, but struggling with himself. And of all the struggles he had had since his journey began, this was the hardest. But at last he sighed and said to himself, "Yes, I understand," and let go of Fenn.

"But," he added, "though I will spare your life, I will not be cheated out of *this*." And he knocked his brother senseless to the ground with the hardest blow he could launch.

A feeling of great weariness gradually came over him, and something very much like sorrow, so that he wanted to cry. "To think I was so afraid of him once," he thought, looking down on Fenn's unconscious body. "How terrible it must be to have a twisted face . . ." He lifted his brother up carefully, and carried him below. There he laid him in a cell and detailed four of his most trustworthy men to guard him, with instructions not to let him escape but to treat him well.

X

Fenn Begins A Journey

And now the bells of the town tolled and rolled again like bronze hearts leaping, and the people danced in the streets. High in the castle, in an audience chamber, Alain talked with Hook, and was unhappy because Hook would accept nothing from him, neither lands nor honors nor positions in the kingdom.

"No, no, no," Hook said. "Do not pain me by making me give you pain! I can accept nothing from you. It is my joy and pleasure to see you grown to manliness and accepting the crown, and I wish for nothing more. Yet if you must give me

something, let it be your love and affection, and I will be content."

"You'll always have those," Alain said. "Ah, Hook, it seems so little!"

"Oh, on the contrary! Those are the greatest gifts anyone can give or receive."

"Yes . . . And what will you do now?"

"Why, I will stay to see you crowned, and then be off into the world again. I'm a guardian genius, after all, and I must be about my business."

"And whose guardian genius will you be now?"

"Ah, who knows?" said Hook. "There is always someone in need of such help as I can give."

They were silent awhile, listening to the sounds of merry-making which came faintly to them from the streets below. Alain sighed.

"Why, come!" said Hook, laughing. "Was there ever a prince who pulled such a long face on the evening of his coronation? Listen to the happiness out there, and be happy with your people; for it's in your power to keep them so."

"And I *will* keep them happy, as well as I know how. It's my brother that makes me sore at heart. What am I to do with him?"

"There are many in the kingdom," said Hook, "that would be glad to see him hang."

"No! There will be no acts of blood while I reign."

"Then," Hook said, looking at him intently, "if you cannot kill him, you must dispose of him some other way."

Alain got up and paced the chamber, shaking his head and frowning. "I don't want to keep him caged like a wild beast, because the longer he is locked up, the more like a wild beast he will become, and it is not right to make him worse than he is. Yet I can't set him at full liberty, for there is such blackness in his heart that he will be a constant danger to me. If only — if only there were some way of making him free, yet under control too —" Suddenly he stopped, and he and Hook looked at each other. "Ah, Hook, Hook, you would not accept a favor from me and make me happy. Let me accept a last favor from you, and make me even happier!"

"Yes?" said Hook, leaning forward.

"Be my brother's guardian genius!"

"Ah! I was hoping you would ask that!"

"Take him on a journey; for there is much to be learned on the high road of the world, as I surely know. It's not hopeless, is it, Hook?"

"Hopeless?" Hook laughed. "What seemed so hopeless as yourself when I collared you in the streets, terrified of your own shadow, and wet and spiritless as a drowned mouse? Difficult he may be, but perhaps not hopeless. We may find something on the road to let the light into his heart and straighten the twist of his mouth."

Alain threw his arms about him, and cried with a catch in

his throat, "Ah, Hook, now I am happier than anyone in the kingdom!"

And on the next day the bells pealed and caroled until they nearly cracked, while Alain was crowned king. And when he drove back to the castle in his carriage, the people went mad in the streets, dancing and singing and playing music and building bonfires and waving torches and banners and throwing their caps into the air. Great quantities of pastry and wine and nuts and fruit and ale were sent out of the castle to the merrymakers.

And King Alain sent servants to take gifts to a certain townsman named Dick and to ask him to make a speech. That gentleman was very much astonished, but very happy to comply. Soon he was being uproariously carried down the street on the shoulders of his friends and hoisted up onto the low wall outside the moat, where he bellowed over the deafening thunder of cheers that his emotions on this noble occasion were such as which no human tongue was capable of telling of. At that point his emotions irresistibly carried him off the wall into the moat, whither he was followed by hordes of whooping ragamuffin boys. And King Alain, watching from the window from which he had jumped so long ago, laughed until tears warmed his cheeks and his sides ached. But as Dick came to the surface again, bellowing damply but with no less enthusiasm about his emotions, Alain stopped laughing. He saw two figures going across the drawbridge and disappearing into the crowd. One was Hook. His left hand gripped his traveling

staff, and his right was clamped firmly on the collar of the other figure. That other was Fenn, looking rather small and frightened, and staggering under the weight of an enormous and very lumpy bundle on his shoulder. The shouts and cheers and Dick's roaring and the music faded away as Alain looked down and thought:

"Farewell and good speed, Fenn! It's a long journey you're setting out upon, and a weary one, and if you have never shed tears in your life, you will learn to do so now. Good speed! May you come to love your companion as I do by the end of your journey, and may I welcome you back from it as my own true brother!"

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